

ABSTRACT

A TEAM APPROACH TO IMPLEMENTING LIVESTOCK BMPS

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Southeastern Washington is an agriculture dependent region. Much of the upland areas are dryland farmed for cereal grains and the low areas near rivers and streams are used to pasture and feed livestock. Many of these areas remain snow free for most of the winter providing an excellent environment in which to raise livestock. Unfortunately, the concentration of animals typically leaves the riparian corridors in poor condition. When riparian vegetation is removed or damaged, impacts such as higher water temperatures, decreased dissolved oxygen, and increased sediment from erosion may occur. Furthermore, removing trees and shrubs can alter stream flow patterns causing higher spring run-off events that damage property. Most of the waterbodies in the region fail state water quality standards for multiple parameters. In addition, southeast Washington rivers and streams are tributaries to the Snake River and provide important habitat to endangered salmonids.

Given today's poor economic climate for agriculture and the availability of federal and state cost-share, the Department of Ecology is currently using a unique, voluntary approach to addressing livestock related water quality problems in Southeastern Washington. Our agency feels the most effective way to improve water quality in agricultural areas is to work locally with those parties who have been effectively addressing these issues for some time. As a result, we have worked to develop partnerships with conservation districts and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) offices. These locally-driven partnerships are providing the financial assistance, technical assistance, and the incentive livestock producers need to implement Best Management Practices (BMPs) so that water quality and fish habitat is significantly improved. We are currently working together to successfully create riparian buffers and implement BMPs at nearly 100 problem sites in four counties in southeastern Washington.

The Department of Ecology has developed individual strategies to address livestock related water quality problems with each conservation district tailored to meet their local needs. The strategies are captured in flow charts and detail responsibilities for all parties involved. The goal of this unique approach is to sit down and develop an implementation plan with each producer who is needing to make management changes. The plan details what will be done and the sources of funding to be used. The producer is given the opportunity to work with the Department of Ecology, the local conservation district, and/or NRCS in an effort to develop their implementation plan.

The overall goal of this effort is to combine the needs of the state to protect water quality and fish habitat and the needs of the producer to successfully manage his or her livestock. A regulatory approach by the Department of Ecology is a tool that remains available only as a last resort when all collaborative efforts fail. As an illustration of our success, all problem sites have thus far been addressed without the need for enforcement activities by Ecology.